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Social Policy and Conflict: *Gezi Park-Taksim* Demonstrations and Uses of Social Policy for Reimagining Turkey

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The article is interested in the ways in which social policy debates, both on particular policy ideas and on policy implementation, are instrumental in understanding socio-political conflicts. In discussing citizenship and the gains obtained by citizens in changing welfare provision Bryan S. Turner argues that ‘the welfare state in Britain after the Second World war and the civil rights movement in America after the Vietnam war were both responses to the mobilization of society and to its self-critical reflection’.¹ This view considers conflict in general, not limited to war, as a productive force within which new ideas are developed and new social relations are articulated. It is a view shared by others who consider conflict an essential part of social change. For them the nature of social change is often related to how conflict is managed and mediated.² I argue that social policy plays a central role in this management process. Another relevant aspect of this relationship between conflict and social policy is considered by Richard Titmuss. He argued in 1955 that ‘war has been an essential stimulus to national self-criticism and social change’.³ He traces the productive relationship between war and social policy and considers the impact of ‘deliberate attempts to organize a society for a war’ even at peacetime.⁴ He argues that the changing nature of modern warfare focused states’ interests ‘in time of war with biological characteristics of its people’.⁵ This thinking allows us to consider the way in which social policy changes are linked with critical events in a society and how a focus on them allows us to analyse and understand critical initiatives to change a society.

With these views in mind here I analyse the Gezi Events of May-June 2013 in Istanbul Turkey. On 28 May 2013 *Gezi Park*, which is adjacent to Istanbul’s central square, Taksim Square, become a contested space. In opposing the planned urban development that would have seen the park replaced by a large new *old building*, a replica of an Ottoman building that occupied the same location in the past, civil society groups occupied the park and confronted the police forces. Here, my aim is to highlight the important role played by social policy ideas and attempts to implement some of these policies by exacerbating already existing conflicts in society, which lead to this confrontation from May to the middle to the end of June 2013. There were an estimated 5000 demonstrations across Turkey with up to 3.5 million people participating.⁶ In the process, police use of tear/pepper gas and water cannons had come to represent Turkish government’s brutal attitude towards its citizens. Thousands of people were gassed regularly and arrested during the events. Even after the end of the events hundreds who either participated or supported the events through social media are still being followed, tried and losing their jobs. For instance, the daily *Radikal* reported on 12 May 2014 that two lecturers were made redundant in Marmara University after a long investigation into the way they condoned student action during the Gezi events within the university campus.⁷

The political confrontations observed in the Gezi events reveal social policies as a domain of conflict as protestors appeared to challenge the promotion of a certain socio-political change that reimagines Turkish society. My aim is not to suggest that the use of social policy for reimagining is a new phenomenon in the Turkish context. On the contrary,

social policies on women's lives, education and even the dress code, were used as central mechanisms through which in the 1920s a new Turkey was imagined at the end of the World War I with the emergence of the new Turkish Republic. I argue that the Gezi events highlight the tensions created by the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*- Justice and Development Party (AKP) government's use of social policy as a tool for challenging since 2002 the past reimagining in Turkey towards a new thinking about the nature of the society. As observed by Umut Bozkurt, for instance AKP has used social security and social assistance programs since 2002 to increase its appeal within the broader Turkish society with the hope that the AKP can create a technical, non-political, consensus to rule the country independent of its Islamic orientation.⁸ What is interesting in Bozkurt's analysis for the present article is the way in which social assistance policies are framed, on the one hand, to appear to target and include everyone in the society and on the other hand aim to underwrite the broader ideological ambitions of the AKP. Thus, this article considers social policy both as one of the grounds of conflict and as one of the tools for the negotiation of the nature of citizenship and belonging in a given society.

There are many ways to think about what is meant by social policy.⁹ Thandika Mkandawire's definition here is helpful, it considers social policy as 'action in society towards a certain change'.¹⁰ If we consider social policies as interventions in society to change it, Desmond King's social policy thinking is also pertinent. He considers social policies as 'purposeful programmes, associated with political ideologies and programmatic ambitions to modify individuals' behaviour and society'.¹¹ This allows for analyses of the way in which social policies become enactments of particular political positions and then become domains of negotiation for various political positions. In addressing this relationship King argues that '[p]oliticians acting within the constraints of democratic institutions, willingly use ideas to serve their ends, whether short-term electoral ones or grander ideological ambitions'.¹² Social policies are produced by political actors working with particular social groups and grounded in a way of thinking about a society, or based on an ideology of being and relating to each other in that society. Approached in this way social policies, their negotiations and the conflicts created by them become methodological entry points to assess and understand competing aspirations for social change in a given society. In this view the assessment of policies engages with socio-political domains within which policies are articulated and with the kinds of views on society they encapsulate. When reactions to policies are observed within the broader societal context, the emergent discussions and conflicts on these within civil society reveal competing visions of social change in that society. Social policies allow a re-imaging of society, not only as they gradually restructure both relations among individuals and groups but also as they restructure the relationship between individuals and the society. The severity of these discussions or conflicts highlight the commitment of various groups to particular social visions. I consider the Gezi events from this angle, as a confrontation that highlights conflicting visions manifested in particular social policy discussions where the stakes are about the way people's lives are reconsidered and recast by the AKP government's social policies in Turkey. Following King's definition I consider the AKP government's social policies as representing an ideological position that presents a challenge to the way in which everyday life has been framed broadly within the Kemalist secular ideology in Turkey. The protestors' reactions

frame the AKP government's social policies as attempts to change the larger society according to a model implicitly grounded on Islamic orientation.

In Turkey the ideal of a multi-party democratic institutional model, with election campaigns, rule of law and policy proposals linked with political parties, provides the context for the socio-political processes to negotiate the relevance of a desired social change in society. However, the Gezi protests question the space available for socio-political negotiation within the democratic governance process. They raise issues on the ways in which government has promoted and implemented its policies for the broader society. King points out that 'policies all entail the state directing some citizens' behaviour or choices (whether quasi-voluntarily or compulsorily), interventions which may affect levels of trust in the government'.¹³ Here the nature of this directing and legitimacy of the process, in other words the nature of the governance, through which it is negotiated is central to the way social policies are seen either beneficial/legitimate or not. Although Bo Rothstein argues that 'it is scarcely possible to carry out a program successfully if it does not enjoy the confidence of the group towards which it is directed, or of the citizens at large',¹⁴ one needs to consider the ground on which the confidence of a government is built. Rothstein's view raises a central issue: do elected governments need, for their policy interventions, to have the confidence of the citizens at large even if many did not vote for the particular government programme? The style of this relationship with the broader citizenry is observed in the way social policies are developed, promoted, implemented and the way a government takes into account the reactions of the citizens as demonstrated in civil society discussions. This analysis provides a way of understanding the interaction between the government and the protestors at the Gezi events as contesting the government's attempts to re-imagine the society.

Considering the way in which the Gezi events, both in Istanbul and across Turkey, emerged in a city square and in relation to a city square there is a tendency to link these events with the occupy movement or the Arab Springs.¹⁵ I diverge from these approaches, in particular as regards to the latter events, given the democratic institutional context within which the Gezi events took place in Turkey.¹⁶ The role of that context for understanding both the emergence, the content of the confrontation and its implications is central. Furthermore, these approaches by claiming similarity with other places do not allow an analysis to understand why people's reactions exploded at the end of May 2013 across Turkey: Why did these events happen, at that time? In this article, I consider the way in which people's reactions are linked with the intersection of everyday lives and the AKP government's social policy initiatives that are increasingly framing these everyday lives. I consider social policy as the domain of this intersection as the government uses policies to inform a particular way of orienting individuals' every day context. I argue that people's reactions during the Gezi events represent the cumulative effect of policy pronouncements of the AKP government often delivered by the Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan and directly targeting the everyday lives of citizens in an attempt to regulate the boundaries of them on the basis of social policies. From Nikos Moudouros' perspective this can also be framed as a reaction within parts of the Turkish society against the AKP government's hegemony to rule and define the society.¹⁷ This hegemony, as argued by Moudouros, is built through the changing political language used by the AKP, primarily by its leader, in relation to the society and through the

way in which social policies, for instance as Moudouros points out on housing¹⁸, are enacted to support the imagined idea of the new Turkey in this process.

In the following I begin by, first, presenting the events as they unfolded in May – June 2013 around Gezi Park in Istanbul. I rely on media reports and observations made during the events through many media channels as well as a set of interviews conducted in Turkey in August and September 2013 with people who participated in demonstrations. In this I briefly look at the events and consider the way in which we can observe people's dissatisfaction with the way the AKP government is trying to intervene in their lives through social policies. Focusing on the language used in the demonstrations and in the responses to them allow us an entry point to consider the role of social policy in shaping peoples' feelings and frustrations that have motivated them either in participating or opposing to these events.¹⁹ Then in the following section I provide, linked to King, an analysis of how the reactions observed in demonstrations reveal the ideological sources of social policies and what is considered to be at stake in this conflictual event. The third section looks at the reactions by the government towards people's demands. This highlights ways in which the event is interpreted within a particular political ideology to maintain momentum for social change linked with their particular social policies.

The Gezi Events May/June 2014

On 28 May 2013 many media outlets in Turkey reported that at midnight the local authority work machines began demolishing one of the walls of Gezi Park, a wall parallel to *Asker Ocağı* Street. Considering that this work allowed these machines to enter the park and it was assumed that they would destroy trees in the park, '50 members of a civil society group named Stand up for Taksim Platform (*Taksim için Ayağa Kalk Platformu*) engaged with work machines to stop their work and waited until the morning in the park'.²⁰ The group hanged a poster from the trees that read 'We are on the watch for Gezi Park'.²¹ On the morning of 28 May police intervened to break up this group so that the work machines could get on with their task. In this confrontation the police were reportedly heavy handed and used pepper gas sprays to disperse the protesters. The work machines that were attempting to remove trees were finally stopped by 'the intervention of Sırrı Süreyya Önder a member of Turkish parliament from Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi-BDP)'.²² The civil society group's action is a clear evidence of ongoing discussions and reactions to the changes initiated around Taksim Square by the implementation of the city transformation policies of the local authority that were supported by the government. This reflects the engagement of civil society groups, trade unions, neighbourhood groups, political party representatives and related professional groups such as the Chamber of Architects in Istanbul since late 2011. Many groups coming together under the '*Taksim Solidarity group* designated the Chamber of Architects Greater City office and Istanbul Chamber of City Planners as their secretariat at their meeting on 25 February 2012'. The group expressed its purpose as to engage and challenge the 'policies presented by the Prime Minister to public as "pedestrianisation" and "revival/development" policies' as being in breach of scientific, technical and legal considerations that will destroy both Taksim Square and Gezi'.²³ The step towards more

organized engagement at this stage provides evidence of the technical and professional engagement with the local authority through various mechanisms that included legal challenges to the plans and court cases. Yet it also signifies a fundamental distrust in the political governance of this policy process to which they think a broader public challenge is needed.

On the third day of the Gezi events the police was constantly trying to stop protestors engaging the work machines by using water cannons and firing pepper gas at them and attempting to break their tents and the camp within the park. While police was dispersing the protestors the work machines resumed their work. Sirri Süreyya Önder again intervened and stopped the machines by standing in front of them. The intervention methods of the police are violent, using armoured vehicles called the *Mass Incident Intervention Vehicle* (TOMA) on which they have water cannons and also constantly firing pepper gas canisters on the protestors in the park. This style of intervention already in the early few days resulted in many injuries. This violent pattern of formal response demonstrated by the police was repeated in the following days with increased ferocity. The aim was to show the government's resolve to get its way to go ahead with its rebuilding plans for Gezi Park. In the meantime violent confrontation with protestors who appeared to be peacefully sitting in the park had generated an image of violence which increased the numbers of protestors not only in Istanbul but in the rest of Turkey with protests to support the Gezi in many parts of the country. As a result, over the following days the protest in the Park grew with many people spending days and nights in the park which become a protected zone with its kitchens, library and many discussion groups attracting more and more people into the area. In some ways it become a centre of attraction on multiple issues but also dominantly a place to discuss environmental issues. Gradually, the wide long steps going down from the Park to Taksim square were barricaded as the square was full of police and TOMAs.

One of the first formal responses from the government came from Minister for Forestry and Waterworks Minister Veysel Eroğlu. Reportedly, he said that 'Gezi Park is a small area' and added 'that there was only a limited number of trees'. He then promised 'to plant "a hundred times more trees than are cut" in Gezi Park elsewhere' and added that 'they had decided to plant 5 million trees in Istanbul'.²⁴ While events both around the Park and the supporting protests across the country were increasing in their numbers the Prime Minister Erdoğan only provided dismissive remarks and argued that the police was doing its job to protect citizens and their property. His main response came on 2 June 2013. He said that 'In the Taksim square we are working on the pedestrianization and we will do it... the Artillery Barracks built in the reign of Selim III in 1780 was demolished by the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*-Republican People's Party) logic and the space was used as a stadium. We will rebuild historic barracks in that space'. He then added that '*inşallah* we will demolish the AKM (Ataturk Cultural Centre- which housed Istanbul opera and concert halls until it was shut down for renovations in 2008). We will build an impressive opera building to replace it'. At that moment someone from the audience said also a mosque and the PM says 'Yes. We will also build a mosque. I am not going to get permission for these from either the secretary general of CHP or from few *çapulcu*. Those who voted for us already authorised us to do these things. Commenting on the Gezi events he added that 'I am clearly stating that we won't let few *çapulcu* to incite the public in that square. This nation voted for us to protect

their history and environment'.²⁵ The word *çapulcu* is worthwhile to consider. It can be translated into English as looters, raiders or more generally as riffraff. It denotes in Turkish use particularly condescending view of people who are seen generally as no use to society. It is a remarkable choice of word by the PM in the middle of a major public unrest across the country. Furthermore, its use at this instance creates one of the breaking points in this process. It is sufficient to say that protesters across the country begun to use the word to define themselves and in the process attributed a new meaning to it by creating a verb, *çapulung* in Turkish or, *chapulling* in English to mean seeking their own rights from political authority and reminding them their purpose. The role of social media in the emergence of chapulling is undeniable as in one case Noam Chomsky is seen on a youtube video sitting next to a poster saying 'I am also a *çapulcu*'.²⁶ This intervention by Erdoğan fuelled further protests in many places. While many thought that it was provocative as they were exercising their democratic right to voice their disagreement, for the people who are living in and around Taksim and who thought that they have direct interest in what happens to the park, it was aggravating. Already by 2 June the Council of the Association of Turkish Doctors reported that there had been 1000 injured across the country.²⁷

The next day on 3 June 2013 just before Erdoğan left Turkey on a formal visit to North Africa he gave another speech and answered some questions from the journalist at the Ataturk Airport in Istanbul. While his speech was broadly talking about the economic successes and other achievements of his government, journalists' questions were more interested in his views on the Gezi events. Given its content it is important to look at it closely. The PM's main argument can be observed in the following answer to a question about his assessment of the events: 'Is this the Turkish Spring? These news are imaginary, they are written by people who do not know Turkey. Look at the countries of Arab spring do they have multiparty democracy? This is the participation to an action organized by radical groups. This is nothing to do with Gezi Park or with trees being destroyed. We have moved 10 trees most of these are relocated and two died. I explained our targets about Gezi Park in 2011 was there any voice for two years no one said anything. We are pedestrianizing the area, these actions are internally and externally linked games [against us and Turkey]....this is not about destroying trees this is about the artillery barracks, the administrators are protecting history. Behind all these actions there is the CHP logic'. A Reuters journalist Birsen Altayli asked where the PM is getting the idea that the people demonstrating were radicals ideologically linked with internal and external power domains. She said that we see housewives, young people from all walks of life presenting their problems in the demonstrations on everyday question of education, health, ban on alcohol and other things. This sparked a response which characterized the PM's general attitude towards the Gezi events in a much more confrontational manner: 'Don't say society. I understand if you say part of the society. In all our regions there are extensions of particular ideologies. There are the representatives of main opposition party (CHP) across Turkey. They might have brought those out. Radical elements are also in these areas. As a member of this society you should ask what is happening here why this is happening now. This is CHP. Don't university people have ideology? At the moment there is a 50 % of this country we are trying to contain with difficulty. We are telling them not to give into provocations. You are talking about education. We have taken unprecedented steps to improve education in this country. You are informing

Reuters in this manner...I have not seen anything about education there in the demonstrations. There is no ban on alcohol, there is the regulation. We are trying to find a way of reducing traffic accidents. The primary reason of this is alcohol use'.²⁸

In this answer the PM adds a new dimension to his labelling of protestors as *çapulcu* a day before. He is arguing that protestors have well-designed political plans against his government and against people who elected his government and that these plans are linked with foreign interests.²⁹ In these statements the PM presents his assessment of the situation by challenging the demonstrators across the country. His challenge is based on showing his government's economic and electoral successes as the grounds of legitimacy for his policy initiatives. His language suggests that his social policy discussions are for the good of the society in general even though some parts of the society have different views on these issues. These statements combined with the police brutality on the ground were a watershed moment in the Gezi events. His approach for many was a significant evidence for moves towards limiting people to express their opposition to AKP policies. While the number of protestors increased over time and they indeed initially focused most of their efforts on the environmental issue and saving the Gezi Park, the PM's explicit position shifted the debate more into the area of policy governance and the role of political rights and freedoms to engage in political debate within that governance process.

On 15 June 2013 after the PM gave a speech in Ankara in which he said that 'either protesters leave Taksim otherwise our security forces know how to empty it'.³⁰ In the evening the police entered the park in Taksim with significant brutality, using gas and water cannons even against those who were trying to hide in buildings that included a hotel and a hospital in the area. While they claimed to have controlled Gezi Park demonstrations, streets across Turkey remained tense for following weeks. In Istanbul, for instance, well into the autumn of 2013 these events created a political momentum within civil society. Many people regularly met in local parks or other spaces to discuss social and political that were at the heart of the events. Given this was the period leading to local elections in Turkey, some of the local candidates for office in Istanbul attended these meetings to be questioned by participants and to present their political agenda.

Social Policy in the Gezi Events

People's voices during these events demonstrated the diversity of backgrounds and different ways in which social policy interventions were impacting their lives. However, the shift in the mood of the protestors discussed above is also observed in the posters and slogans used by them. In addition to many environmental statements that initially dominated the discussion such as 'Capitalists cut trees when they cannot sell their shade' to 'these trees will still be here when you are gone' and 'People do not approve the destruction of Gezi Park', people's focus moved towards a more general confrontation with the AKP government's policies and its governance style. Here I will use number of slogans as an entry point for the analyses. Many of these policy areas are about personal choices and private life. In this issues that target women's lives were particularly important. One read 'Tayyip do you want three more kids like us' this was engaging with the PM's long standing campaign to motivate families to

increase the number of children they want to have to three. In a similar vein other posters carried by women read ‘I make love but I don’t marry, I get pregnant but don’t have a baby’, ‘Tayyip hands off my body’, ‘Abortion is a right’ and ‘we don’t want anti-women PM’ were all targeting the language of policy used by the PM in discussing possible policy changes before the Gezi events. On many occasions the PM expressed his clear views on women and significantly his aims to regulate women’s lives by signalling a new way of thinking on laws regulating abortion procedures in Turkey.

The newly introduced alcohol regulation system was occupying people’s minds as yet another interference with everyday lives. The PM has used alcoholic drink consumption as a derogatory behaviour in his many speeches targeting opposition to him. One slogan read ‘You banned the alcohol, the nation sobered up’ while another one said ‘grandchildren of two drunks are coming’ this was a reference to the PM’s derogatory speech in the parliament on 28 May 2013 where he argued that ‘a law made by two drunks are legitimate for you but why a law proposed by the truths established by religious belief is not’.³¹ This statement created a major debate as to who he was referring to as two drunks whether it was an implicit reference to Atatürk and İnönü founders of the republic or not. The new law that regulates selling of alcoholic drinks was announced on 11 June 2013 in the Official Bulletin³² and came into effect on 9 September 2013. It banned retailers to sell alcoholic drinks between 22:00 pm and 6:00am and does not allow these to be sold around or near to schools or places of worship. Furthermore, the advertisement of alcoholic drinks in all media including internet was banned. Here, the issue is the way in which this regulation was introduced leading to its announcement. Considering that according to the WHO, in Turkey the alcohol consumption rate is 3.4 % per capita, this might be considered to be far too low for requiring such strict regulation. Erdoğan’s well established dislike of alcoholic drinks is considered to be underwriting the policy rather than just being about the impact of alcohol consumption on individual health as has been promoted. It is seen as a continuation of a program which begun in 2002 under AKP government. The situation is linked with the gradual increase of tax on alcoholic drinks introduced by the AKP government since 2002 according to a report by Euromonitor cost of traditional drink rakı increased from 9.15 Turkish lira in 2002 to 51 lira in 2012 while in the tax on beer rose 737 % between 2002 and 2009.³³

Why are these policy issues, such as family planning, city planning, or the link between health and alcoholic drink consumption so contentious? In these policy areas the government has appeared to be in consultation with various civil society groups and no doubt there are divergent views on what should be the substance of policies in these fields. Many of these policies are introduced through the proper parliamentary procedure. Therefore, one can consider the location of these debates to be within the conventional policy process rather than being on the streets in a great confrontation with the political authority. The contention is created in the way these issues are presented to public as policy concerns and then implemented as policy interventions. In other words, the governance of social policy has become as contentious as the content of these policies. The PM has personally appeared as the main promoter of most of the ideas underpinning policies from regulations on abortion to pronouncing on how *ayran*, a yogurt based drink and not rakı, an alcohol based drink, was the Turkish traditional drink and commented on people’s personal choices directly. So, in the Gezi demonstrations direct reactions to the PM’s style of governance were dominant.

Underlying this is the unease about the fact that the AKP government has the majority share of the parliament and the President of the Republic, Abdullah Gül, whose approval is sought for all laws to be implemented was one of the founders of the AKP party. The unease was about the integrity of the democratic process which was used by the PM to justify his policies. As a result the policy process was seen as driven by the PM and his ideas without many checks and balances. Many slogans were linking his personal style of politics and the impact of this on the broader governance issues. The link between police use of pepper gas, its brutality and the apparent ease with which the PM justified police interventions is recognized in the following and similar slogans that read ‘chemical Tayyip’. There were many slogans questioning the engagement with citizens by using force in this way. Another one read ‘Don’t touch my home, my city, and my living space’ questioning the government’s claimed right to intervene in people’s living spaces.

The presence of the LGBT people in the Gezi Park was also linked with the governance aspects of the situation. Their interventions were disrupting the AKP government’s democratic language by pointing out the constitutional change initiated to further bolster democratization in Turkey did not address their freedoms and rights as LGBT people. One of their slogans read ‘To live is to resist, LBGT are on the streets’ while another one read ‘I am faggot, I am trans, I am lesbian, I am sex worker, I am in Gezi and I am resisting’ these were significant claims to have a voice in ongoing political debates. LGBT campaign to influence the constitutional change was not successful in particular the new constitution does not protect people against discrimination and violence based on sexual identity. The government ignored many campaigning to include these considerations as part of the new criminal justice package in the new constitution. While the government is trying to regulate women’s lives in a particular way to redefine the nature of the Turkish society, LGBT people were highlighting the fact that the same government by not tackling sexuality-based violence and crimes is effectively excluding them from its policy considerations and as a result from politics in general. Another slogan located what was happening at the time into the broader context of changes that was initiated in the previous year and it read ‘This resistance is not only about Gezi Park, it is for two drunks, for Reyhanli, for 19 May and 29 October celebration of which are banned and for people run out of patience’. The statement identifies set of changes introduced in public life since 2012 that included restrictions on public celebrations of national holidays associated with the republic. The last part of this statement is particularly significant in highlighting the threshold at which the relationship between the PM and the citizens has become questionable. These demonstrations become statements about ‘not to be governed thusly’.³⁴ Social policies come to signify unacceptable governance of everyday life.

What do these reactions indicate?

It is clear that protestors see social policy change in the areas identified above as interventions either on their everyday lives or the potential removal of already gained rights as demonstrated in the case of abortion question. Given that many people do not react to social policy changes in this manner the Gezi events underline the clash with an alternative

interpretation on various policy interventions. Protestors consider many policies initiated by the AKP government as embodying implicit attempts to change a way of living beyond the claimed technical substance of these policies. Here, a closer look at this interpretation will highlight the ideological stakes in the confrontations around the Gezi Park. As the slogan mentioned above locating the Gezi events in the broader context highlights, social policy interventions are taking place in the broader context of the AKP government's engagement with the Turkish military and what it sees as a particularly didactic secular nationalism that framed socio-political life in Turkey since 1920s. As I discuss elsewhere the AKP government has confronted this Kemalist secularism and the way it has regulated everyday life in Turkey.³⁵ The contention has been about the way in which the Kemalist-secular political ideology excluded people who were diverging from this position, in particular those who have religious positions determining their everyday lives in the society by excluding them from having a voice in public life in Turkey. Since 2002, this confrontation has manifested itself on the debates about the ban on women with headscarves from having access to university education. The AKP government engaged with this issue head on and expanded its policy focus to open up the public participation of women with headscarves starting with education leading into areas including courts, civil service and the parliament. This issue was a critical challenge for many secular people in terms of their Turkish identity which had been broadly enforced by the state. In addition, long-drawn court cases brought against the high ranking serving and retired military officers have occupied Turkish public discussion since 2007.³⁶ The officers were tried with treason charges accusing them with planning a coup d'état against the elected government. This is considered to be another step towards the further democratisation of the society by removing the influence of military as the defender of the Kemalist secular state.

The possibility of doing politics without the threat from the military marked a major change from the past. In line with this the AKP led a constitutional reform process that aimed to change the particular aspects of the 1980 constitution written after the military coup. This new civilian direction became a lever used by Erdoğan to justify other policy initiatives. It is highlighted in his above discussed press conference on 3 June 2013. In it he points out that that '[W]e have been servants of our nation not their masters. Economic indicators are growing our GDP was 3500 US dollars and now it is 10500 US dollars. They don't want us to achieve this we are going beyond modernity, they are trying to stop us, we love our nation, we'll follow our path together with our people'.³⁷ The first sentence here is an important denotation to show his difference from the past in which, according to him, a political class together with military isolated themselves from the people and aimed to maintain a particular nationalism at all costs. This view signals a change in politics that engages with people's everyday concerns and lives. This is reiterated constantly, as it is here, in reference to how AKP government brought economic prosperity into people's lives.

By using the economic prosperity argument together with his success in democratization process in isolating the influence of military, the PM has presented his views on social policy in a number of areas to change the society. For instance, in a speech given at the International Parliamentarians Conference on the Action Plan for Population and Development Conference in 24 May 2012 in Istanbul he argued that: 'As Turkey we are very sensitive about children. I love children. I want at least three children in my country. Because

I know that we need young dynamic population and we are working on this. I also want to state this clearly, I am a Prime Minister who is against caesarean section at birth. I see abortion as a murder. No one should have a right to allow this. You either kill the child in the womb or after the birth, there is no difference. We ought to be very sensitive to this. We have to cooperate against this'.³⁸ It was very clear in the following days this was not just Erdoğan's view but it was the direction of his government as he repeated this argument in many political forums and announced that the government established a working group to develop a new policy. The new policy would change the existing law that allowed women to have abortion up to 10 weeks in public hospitals. Also, in a similar vein the working group would consider how to regulate caesarean section provision which is generally based on the decision of the pregnant women. Since then in the light of major opposition from many medical professionals, policy experts and women groups neither a new abortion law nor the caesarean section regulation have been implemented. However, the discussion is still used by the Kemalist opposition as a sceptre indicating a danger, as in the Gezi events. This was also highlighted by an intervention from a female CHP member of parliament who called on Erdoğan that it is the time to 'stop policing vaginas'.³⁹ What is at stake in this discussion is the role of women to decide about their lives. The existing law allows women to be in control of their lives while in opposition to this the AKP appears to consider women's lives in relation to their role in the family. This particular angle was revealed in his speech at an event organized by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy to introduce their new project of Becoming a Family on 17 June 2013. According to the reports he talked about 'the identity of AKP as a conservative democrat and said that their fundamental target is the family'. He then argued that '[i]n this country for years they implemented birth control mechanism. They almost neutered our people. Caesarean section and abortion are all about this. When they were doing these they almost committed murder. Almost conned people. We need to break this game, as a result families in this country have a big role'.⁴⁰ Here, it is clear that the PM and AKP are recasting women's role according a rather conservative and restricted understanding of family. It is within that context that they defend rights of women, for instance to have access to education and take public offices, and bring all women a *new* dignity.

The PM and his government have developed social policies that aim to introduce new regulations to protect people while at the same time recast social relations in the society from a conservative-paternalistic position. This is evident in Erdoğan's comments on alcohol regulation given on 2 June 2012. He said that 'I love my people. I don't want them to be alcoholics ...I consider it to be my duty to intervene on this. Before us they passed 58. Article of the constitution. It says that we have to take measures to protect young people. There is an obligation. They say that I am against it because of the religious edicts. If this is a very good thing for the people and the society, the religion does not order us to do things that are not beneficial. Why should not I do as it says? Is this a bad thing? We are a conservative-democratic Party. We express our views with absolute clarity...[people] should know that because I am concerned about their health I am involved in this. I am doing all this because I love my citizens'.⁴¹ Here, the PM was essentially using the justification of an idea of protecting young people included in the constitution to develop a policy that is substantively based on his religious understanding of the role of alcohol in the society. In this he seems to

show that he is acting within the boundaries of the secular constitution while his reason of doing so is located in religion.

These kinds of linkages between what initially is presented as technical social policy interventions and the reasons as to why the PM and the government consider these to be relevant policies on the basis of deeper ideological grounds are clearly observed by people. Furthermore, between the PM's pronouncements and convergence in the arbitrary application of existing policies is witnessed. It is this dynamic between policies as technical solutions, their particular ideological justifications and what seems to be experienced by people as policies in their everyday lives is creating the unease and leading to confrontations. There are two important parallel issues here: a) for some protestors these public pronouncements by the PM justifying social policies are signals for a fundamental structural change in the way Turkish secular identity is cast; b) for some the divergence between technical policy formulations and their ideological justifications create a distrust in the governance style and the direction of the PM and AKP. Furthermore, this distrust is about the PM's paternalistic attitude towards people's everyday lives which is associated with arbitrariness in policy implementation.

The abortion debate is an informative example of this situation. As discussed earlier the PM made his position clear and many women protestors during the Gezi events were tackling his position. Then, on March 2014 Turkish Gynaecology and Obstetrics Association announced controversially that 'abortion procedure that is provided free up to 10 weeks within the social protection system in the public hospitals linked to Ministry of Health is ended'. They argued that this happened as 'the online health registration code for this particular procedure is removed from the system. As a result doctors cannot perform the procedure without getting authorization from the system leading to stopping all relevant inspections and procedures in this area'.⁴² This particular situation attracted a lot of attention from health practitioners as well as from civil society groups that also complained about the problem. The president of the above association Prof. Dr. S. Cansun Demir called on the ministry to explain what appears to be an unlawful intervention into women's health. In response to these on 12 March 2014 Ministry of Health issued a statement in which they explained the legal status of abortion and then said that 'there is no restriction to have abortion procedure before 10 weeks in hospitals linked to our ministries'.⁴³ On 17 March 2014 a small report by Çağla Ağırgöl and Burçak Cürül published on a civil society website. In order to test the system the authors went to register in two clinics attached to two different medical schools in Istanbul and were told at the registry of one of them that 'this is a university hospital and demand-based abortion is not done. It is banned'. Immediately afterwards talking to doctors in the same clinic they were told that '[n]o there is no ban, we are on strike today. Come back on Monday and we'll do the required paperwork'. They further note varying practices within hospitals.⁴⁴ Similar variations were also reported across the country.⁴⁵ It is not clear in any of these reports what drives the professionals to implement the law in an apparently arbitrary fashion. However, parallels are drawn between the PM's views on abortion and the arbitrary decisions related with the implementation. Yet again, women's social welfare issue become the contested grounds on which ideological debate is fought and political confrontation takes place.

Conclusion

In a way of concluding I will argue that Gezi events represent an ideological conflict on social change which is manifesting itself in social policies that are being promoted by the AKP government in Turkey. The Gezi events critically highlight both the way the political authority is using social policies to influence a socio-political change in Turkey and how protestors interpret this kind of instrumentalization of social policies. For the protestors, the ongoing introduction of new social policies in contradiction to the Kemalist secular underpinnings of society and the arbitrary implementation of existing laws indicate that democratic institutions of the system are at their limits. In this conflict social policy is both used as evidence of unwanted ideological change motivating activism and as evidence for government's democratic claims of inclusive governance. For Erdoğan and the AKP the ability to make and implement social policies in this transformative manner is a sign of their democratic credentials underwriting their political legitimacy. This democratic legitimacy claim is allowing Erdoğan to assert a *consensual*, and for some a hegemonic, pathway to shape the society through his policies. The same claim has also allowed him to reduce the diversity of protestors first as a homogenous group of *çapulcular* and second as a group that is against the inclusive democratic change to ultimately dismiss their claims. This ideological clash revealed in social policy debates also highlight the current dynamics of politics in Turkey.

The Gezi protestors clearly stated that they did not want to be governed by the AKP government. Arguably, they also implicitly asserted that the Kemalist republican ideology is the appropriate grounds of the democratic processes in Turkey. As a result, independent of the democratic process situating AKP's policy interventions, the AKP and its supporters' views become marginal to the governance in *their* Kemalist society, in *their* Turkey. In this the AKP supporters' political voice is negated. This claim to govern at the expense of other's political voices is at heart of the republican model of politics that is defined as 'one of a system of institutions, laws and moral values that eliminate democratic excess by making state and society homogenous'.⁴⁶ The Gezi protestors at times 'unintentionally reified' this model of state and its governance imperatives of the society.⁴⁷ This position resolutely ignores that fact that the ideological position of Erdoğan and the AKP should be considered as a claim *not to be governed thusly* based on the lived experience within the Kemalist republican imagination. In other words the AKP policies represent an argument against that way of being governed. Therefore, their position is both a claim to have a political voice and be part of Turkey without agreeing to be citizens moulded in the Kemalist imagination. However, the discussions on social policies also reveal that both sides of the conflict are locked in the same political culture.

While the ideological contention has solidified around particular policy issues, such as abortion impacting women's everyday lives, both sides claim that their views should underwrite the values and norms of the society. Both sides' social policies are advocating to organize the entire society by describing an ideal type of women.⁴⁸ While Erdoğan is opposing to be governed by the Kemalist ideology, he is using the republican mechanism as

mentioned above to promote policies that will homogenize social relation in the society according to his own ideology. The tension here is about the way democratic life that is supposed to be about ‘pluralization’ is referenced to republican politics of consensus that aims to homogenize the society.⁴⁹ As Rancière points out that ‘consensus consists in the reduction of democracy to the way of life or ethos of a society, the dwelling and lifestyle of a specific group’.⁵⁰ The creation of consensus and reduction of diverse ways of living for both sides are managed through social policies that control people’s everyday behaviour. From Akhil Gupta’s view this is a struggle ‘against currently hegemonic configurations of power of domination’ and ‘it involves a cultural struggle’ manifesting itself in this case through social policy debates.⁵¹ But contrary to Gupta’s argument and the AKP’s language of being ‘counter-hegemonic’, as suggested by Yel and Nas, their politics is not about ‘the transformation of the manner in which the state comes to be constructed’ it is rather about how to supplant one ideology over another one to utilize the existing oligarchic power of the state over the society.⁵² AKP’s language underwriting their policies has been about opening up the democracy to those who were made voiceless in the society. AKP seems to present itself as the ‘newcomer’ to the public sphere and aim to open the democratic politics to new issues and questions to challenge the state’s ‘claim to embody the sole principle of public life and in so doing be able to circumscribe the understanding and extension of life’.⁵³ However, as evidenced both in their use of the state power, for instance the police, and justifications they give for their social policies, it is clear that AKP is more interested in establishing its own ideology as the organizing principle of the society. The challenge facing AKP then is to develop policies that are not hostage to one ideology or another but based on deliberative and inclusive non-hegemonic political processes.

Notes

1. Turner, “*The erosion of citizenship*”, 191.
2. Dahrendorf, *Essays in the Theory*; Hampshire, *Justice is conflict*.
3. Titmus, “*War and Social Policy*”, 198.
4. Ibid, 73.
5. Ibid.
6. de Bellaigue, “*Turkey: Surreal, Menacing, Pompous*”.
7. Radikal, *Kampüs Bahçesine Çıktılar*.
8. Bozkurt, “Neoliberalism with a human”, 384-387.
9. Dean, *Social Policy*.
10. Mkandawire, “*Social Policy in development*”.
11. King, *In the name of Liberalism*, 3.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid, 25.
14. Rothstein, “*Political Institutions: An Overview*”, 72
15. Žižek, *Trouble in Paradise*.
16. Igsiz, *Brand Turkey and the Gezi*.
17. Moudouros, “Rethinking Islamic Hegemony”, 191-193.
18. Ibid.
19. Béland, “*The Politics of Social Policy*”.

20. Hürriyet, *Taksim Gezi Parkında Yıkım*.
21. Ibid.
22. Hürriyet, *Polis Gezi'de Müdahale etti*.
23. CAGC, *Taksim Dayanışmasının Güncesi*.
24. Hürriyet, *Raid on 'Occupy Taksim Park'*.
25. Akşam, *CHP ve birkaç çapulcudan* and Radikal, *Erdoğan: AKM Yıkılacak*.
26. Chomsky, *I am also Çapulcu*
27. CATD, *Uygulanan Orantısız Şiddet Kabul*.
28. Erdogan, *Başbakan Erdoğan Atatürk Havalimanında*. On education see Çelik and Gür, *Turkey's Education Policy During*.
29. Haber 61net, *Erdoğan: Evinde zorla tuttuğumuz*.
30. Radikal, *Erdoğan: 'Güvenlik güçlerimiz parkı*.
31. Erdoğan, *Erdoğan 'İki ayyaş ifadesi'*.
32. Official Bulletin, *Kanun No.6487*.
33. Euromonitor, *Consumer Lifestyles in Turkey*.
34. Fehrer, "Introduction: The Governed in Politics", 14.
35. Seckinelgin "Civil society between"; Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern*.
36. Eseyan, "Ergenekon: An Illegitimate Form".
37. Erdoğan, *Başbakan Erdoğan Atatürk Havalimanında*.
38. Erdogan, *Erdoğan'in 'Kürtaj cinayettir'*.
39. Nazlıaka, *Siyasette 'Kürtaj-sezeryan-vajina*.
40. Erdoğan, *Erdoğan 'İki ayyaş ifadesi'*.
41. Erdoğan, *Gündem Twitter*.
42. TGOA, *Kürtaj SGK Kapsamından çıkarılabilir mi*.
43. MoH, *10 Haftaya kadar yapılan kürtajlarda*.
44. Ağırşöl and Cüröl, *Merdiven Altı' Kürtaj Yasallaştı*.
45. Aktif Haber, *Yasa Yok ama Kürtaj Yasak*.
46. Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 68.
47. Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy*, 108.
48. Sancar, *Türk Modernleşmesinin Cinsiyeti*.
49. Yel and Nas, "After Gezi: Moving Towards", 186.
50. Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics*, 72.
51. Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy*, 108.
52. Ibid.
53. Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 62.

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